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Editorial Note

Contemporary Politics Lost in Dead Ends? – Not Necessarily!

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"Politics does not create ideals, that is the task of philosophy. It does not calm thoughts or passions, that is the task of faith. It does not care for nuances, nor does it study peculiarities, for these belong to the field of literature. Politics satisfies the needs of life; it is not imagination, but work. Therefore it requires power, it requires society. And with society one cannot reach an ideal, but only approach it. Conscious peoples, like serious individuals, walk in slow, but firm steps. Only children run, stumble, break their noses or even heads. Denial is not criticism, but vulgarism. True criticism builds, it does not destroy. True criticism, by exposing the evil, demonstrates the good. It presents both light and warmth, since it originates not only from truth, but also from love. Truth without love is just half of truth, love without truth is a fade shadow of love."

Stjepan Radić, 1904 (translated by Jasmina Božić)

I decided to begin this Editorial Note with now more than a century-old quotation from Stjepan Radić, the founder of the Croatian People's Peasant Party and one of the greatest Croatian politicians of all times. There are several reasons for this choice. Let me start with the more superficial ones. First of all, a quotation from a Croatian politician seems to be appropriate for the introduction to the thematic issue dealing with research on political attitudes and mentalities in Croatia. Second, a high esteem that Radić

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enjoys among Croatian citizens 85 years after his death testifies to his political greatness. It is not an exaggeration to say that Radić's reputation is still today higher than that of most Croatian contemporary politicians.

But there are also more substantive reasons for the choice of this particular quotation. The foremost among those is Radić's realisation that “*politics requires society*”. This is all the more important if one takes into account that Radić is widely known for his insistence on the importance of economy for the nation's well-being. However, here we see that he did not forget society either, because, as he implied, the power of politics draws its legitimacy from the society. I find these thoughts still actual. Politics indeed requires both economy and society. I would also add that none of the members of this triple may be subsumed under the remaining two. And in particular, society, understood as a domain in which distinctively human sociality and solidarity have been exercised, cannot be subsumed under economy or politics – a fact that seems to be so easily overlooked today.

Another important point is Radić's insistence on “*consciousness of peoples*” and “*seriousness of individuals*”. Let me dare to suppose if Radić were still alive, he would today speak of “*reflexive*” peoples and individuals, since only reflexive human agents are capable of “*true criticism*”, as he conceived it.

Finally, there is in Radić's words, particularly in the last lines, a tone of deep and universal morality – something I find sorely missing from most of today's political discourse. To all those who argue that politics should avoid moralizing discourse, I can only reply that grounding one's discourse in deep and universal morality is very different from superficial moralizing. After all, the basic values of equality and freedom, on which democracy rests, are deeply and universally moral, so that democracy and democratic politics are in that sense inseparable from morality. Accepting others as dignified human beings is a moral requirement in the sense that no amount of economic calculation can justify it, yet it is the requirement on which any democratic project needs to be based if it is to be called democratic at all.

Moreover, the greatest politicians, from Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi, to Vaclav Havel and Nelson Mandela, were all figures of undeniable moral integrity. Instead of relentlessly searching for more effective rhetorical spins, contemporary politicians should do much better if they were more careful about their moral integrity. Naturally, performing verbal acrobatics is much easier than building integrity (as reflected in the “*talk is cheap*” idiom), but the price to be paid is a low esteem for the politicians' profession in general. Some would say the low esteem besets politics since its beginnings, yet the great names that I mentioned testify that it does not have to be so.

Democratic societies should strive toward a balanced development of the political, the economic, and the public sphere. I hope the readers will be able to draw a similar conclusion after reading the articles included in this thematic issue, because studying political attitudes and mentalities, their formation and development, should improve our understanding of how political processes exert influence on and are influenced by the economy and the society, i.e. how these processes condition and are themselves conditioned by activities of humans, who act not only as economic agents, but also as flesh-and-blood social beings.

In the first contribution, *Ivana Ferić* and *Vesna Lamza Posavec* explore preconditions that need to exist in order for pre-election polls to have influence on voters' intentions and expectations. They constructed a research instrument measuring select preconditions, such as familiarity with pre-election polls, knowledge of election results, trust in the credibility of polls, and applied it on a nationally representative sample of potential voters at the 2011 Croatian Parliamentary elections. Data on a series of dependent variables describing voters' intentions and expectations were also collected. Logistic regression was conducted in order to investigate whether voters' intentions and expectations can be explained by the

aforementioned preconditions. It turned out that this was the case for voters' expectations, whereas the influence of the preconditions on voters' intentions was less certain.

Nebojša Blanuša in his contribution investigates the extent to which various conspiracy theories shape Croatian public opinion. The paper's main thesis is that the national division of the Croatian society in World War II is still today reflected as the main cleavage within the Croatian body politic, and that it also finds expression in conspiracy theories underlying the worldviews of the Croatian constituency. Blanuša identifies two main groups of such theories: conspiracies of internal and external enemies, and government conspiracies during the 90's. He shows that voters of conservative parties are prone to believe in the conspiracies of internal and external enemies, while the voters of social-democratic and liberal parties are more inclined toward the government conspiracies. However, these differences seem to become less pronounced with time. The author also shows that beliefs in conspiracies are associated with a public perception of the current Croatian democracy as merely "simulated".

Antonija Petričušić in her contribution analyses current societal conditions in the countries of Western Balkans. She finds that citizens generally do not trust political institutions, manifest considerable apathy for social and political actions, and believe they themselves are not able to influence the political process. This results in a low and inadequate political participation in all surveyed countries, and along with their undeveloped political culture, it indicates inadequate democracy promotion through the European Union's accession policy in the region. Petričušić argues that, instead of merely exporting the regulatory framework, the European Union should consider changing its pre-accession democratisation approach to Western Balkans countries by paying more attention to development of an adequate political culture and the implementation of civic education programs – in short, to making democracy a "habit of the heart" of the Western Balkans peoples.

Martin Neumann and *Armano Srblijinović* contribute with the final part of their series of essays which has been continuing through the last two issues of the EQPAM journal. Neumann and Srblijinović explore possibilities to make democracies "more democratic", following in the tradition of theorists of deliberative democracy. They develop the notion of "distributed reflexivity", assuming each member of a society is able to start or join a discussion on any issue of his or her concern, to exercise his or her reasoning freely, and to make up his or her mind on any such issue, taking into account, when doing so, that other people have equal capacities and equal rights to do the same. The authors argue that the argumentative feedback generated under the conditions of distributed reflexivity is able to bring about a gradual self-transformation of democratic societies.

Finally, *Armano Srblijinović* provides an overview of research on political attitudes in Croatia. The overview lists more than a hundred relevant bibliographical items. The overview, as well as this whole thematic issue, should encourage a more systematic appraisal of this considerable, yet somewhat disregarded body of scientific knowledge.